

South Dakota National Guard

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Symposium connects professionals in support of veterans

By Sgt. Mark VanGerpen

SDNG Service Member & Family Support

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. – The South Dakota Coalition for Military Families hosted its second annual symposium in support of service members, veterans and military families, Sept. 10-11, at the Washington Pavilion in Sioux Falls.

The goal of the symposium was to connect professionals of all disciplines from across South Dakota in order to learn from each other, strengthen a statewide network of professionals and educate them on the wide variety of unique challenges that service members face.

“The bottom line is, we are here to talk about and take care of veterans and their families,” said Larry Zimmerman, South Dakota’s Secretary of Veteran’s Affairs. “After combat, they and their families need help. We need to learn what these veterans need and what their family members need.”

More than 15 sessions at the symposium targeted the many needs and issues created by deployment and long periods of military training, such as issues with employment, finances, education, mental and physical health, and sometimes even legal challenges.

In bringing together more than 150 professionals from across South Dakota, the symposium presented an opportunity to create a stronger network of care in order to more effectively meet the challenges of military service, no matter where a service member lives or when they served.

“As horrendous as war is, the greater cost lingers long after the guns have fallen silent,” said retired Maj. Gen. Ray Carpenter, former acting director of the Army National Guard. “The most significant cost of war is the toll taken on the service members and their families.”

Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, adjutant general of the South Dakota National Guard, emphasized that even with deployments coming to an end, the needs of service members and their families will not change.

“Just because these wars are ending doesn’t mean the service member’s services won’t be needed for a long, long time,” Reisch said. “Taking care of these patriots is some of the most important work that we could ever do.”

Rachel Haigh-Blume, executive director of Northeast South Dakota Area Health Education Center, said that the roots of the symposium go back four years, to a one-day event with five speakers and 20 attendees.

SDCMF launched two years later and has helped grow the symposium into a two-day conference featuring 70 presenters and more than 150 attendees.

Dr. Bill Meirose, transition assistance advisor with the South Dakota National Guard, said that as SDCMF moves forward, he hopes to see even more civilian organizations get involved and take an active role, so that when service members do need help, there will truly be no wrong door they can walk into.

“Just as the job of those who protect our country will never be finished, the job of those who care for our service members will never be finished,” Carpenter said.

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High resolution photos are available at www.flickr.com/photos/southdakotationalguard



140910-Z-LN227-036: U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, adjutant general of the South Dakota National Guard, welcomes more than 150 attendees to the second annual South Dakota Coalition for Military Families Symposium, held Sept. 10-11, 2014, at the Washington Pavilion in Sioux Falls, S.D. The two-day event brought professionals together from across South Dakota in order to build a stronger network of support for South Dakota's service members, veterans and military families. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Mark VanGerpen/Released)



140910-Z-LN227-038: Courtney Nesheim, left, represents Helpline 2-1-1, a military helpline, at the second annual South Dakota Coalition for Military Families Symposium, held Sept. 10-11, 2014, at the Washington Pavilion in Sioux Falls, S.D. The two-day event brought professionals together from across South Dakota in order to build a stronger network of support for South Dakota's service members, veterans and military families. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Mark VanGerpen/Released)



140910-Z-LN227-043: U.S. Army retired Maj. Gen. Ray Carpenter, former acting director of the U.S. Army National Guard, speaks at the second annual South Dakota Coalition for Military Families Symposium, held Sept. 10-11, 2014, at the Washington Pavilion in Sioux Falls, S.D. The two-day event brought professionals together from across South Dakota in order to build a stronger network of support for South Dakota's service members, veterans and military families. Carpenter said that the while America's military involvement in the current wars is winding down, the needs of service members, veterans and their families will remain for a long time. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Mark VanGerpen/Released)



140910-Z-LN227-046: Professionals from multiple services and disciplines sit in on a session covering the signs and symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder at the second annual South Dakota Coalition for Military Families Symposium, held Sept. 10-11, 2014, at the Washington Pavilion in Sioux Falls, S.D. The two-day event brought more than 150 professionals together from across South Dakota in order to build a stronger network of support for South Dakota's service members, veterans and military families. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Mark VanGerpen/Released)

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